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**NORTH KOREA IN THE 21ST CENTURY
PRINCIPLED ENGAGEMENT BY AN UNLIKELY COALITION**

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NORTH KOREA IN THE 21ST CENTURY: PRINCIPLED ENGAGEMENT BY AN UNLIKELY COALITION

INTRODUCTION

As the United States (US) prosecutes the war on terror, the last vestige of the Cold War approaches its 50th anniversary. On July 27, 1953, the forces of South Korea (backed by the US and the United Nations (UN)) and North Korea (backed by China and Russia) signed an armistice agreement creating a shaky truce on the Korean peninsula.¹ The dynamic global change since 1953 is breathtaking - the Soviet Union collapsed, China emerged as a quasi-market based regional power, Germany re-unified, and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) expanded. Juxtaposed is the static situation on the peninsula, where a large armed force remains on both sides of the demilitarized zone (DMZ) waiting for the other to attack.

The purpose of this paper is to consider the strategic environment prevalent on the Korean Peninsula today and to advocate a US National Security Strategy. This strategy will contemplate US objectives for the Korean peninsula within the context of regional stability and apply the appropriate instruments of national security strategy, consistent with existing domestic and international constraints. This paper will also consider a contingency military strategy that would be applied if the advocated strategy failed and North Korea initiated hostilities.

THESIS

This paper's thesis is that a strategy of principled engagement on the Korean peninsula offers the best prospect for Far East regional stability. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea or DPRK) threatens to destabilize this region because it possesses weapons of mass destruction (WMD), maintains a large conventional force that is out of proportion to defensive requirements, and engages in missile technology proliferation. By engaging North Korea, in concert with an unlikely coalition consisting principally of the Republic of Korea

(South Korea or ROK) and Japan, as well as China and, to a lesser degree, Russia and the European Union, the US can best address regional stability. Clearly, there are divergent views within this proposed coalition, but sufficient common ground exists to move the peninsula to a comprehensive settlement.

This thesis on how to approach North Korea is not universally shared and there are two main antitheses. The first advocates that the world should isolate North Korea, using severe economic sanctions to compel the nation to implode.² The second suggests that the world should avoid the resulting regional instability of a DPRK failure through appeasement.³

US OBJECTIVES FOR REGIONAL STABILITY

The Korean peninsula is in the US's vital strategic interest.⁴ The US has strong economic, diplomatic, cultural, and military ties to Japan and South Korea (the ROK is the US's seventh largest trading partner), as well as evolving relations with other nations in the region including China and Russia. Economically, over one-third of all US trade is conducted within this region.⁵ Militarily, the US is committed to the defense of South Korea and maintains 37,000 troops in the ROK. Left unchecked, the DPRK's nuclear program could threaten the US mainland with inter-continental ballistic missiles (ICBMs).⁶

The overarching US goal is Far East regional stability. Accordingly, the US has specific goals for the Korean Peninsula that impact regional stability. They are:

- 1) A peninsula that is free from WMD, especially nuclear weapons.⁷ This includes verified international inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). All parties agree that a DPRK nuclear capability is a destabilizing regional influence and support this goal.⁸
- 2) The US seeks to avoid the proliferation of missile and nuclear technology to unstable regions. North Korea continues to develop and export missile technology to clients such as Iran, Pakistan, and Libya.⁹ This goal is consistent with the UN non-proliferation treaty, which all regional parties have ratified.

3) The US supports unification of North and South Korea; however, it does not seek to force a timeline on the participants, preferring to allow the Korean people to determine when and how best to proceed.¹⁰ Like its Taiwan policy, the US advocates peaceful resolution by the two nations involved. All regional actors as well as the EU support this goal.¹¹

4) The US seeks a reduction in conventional forces on the peninsula.¹² North Korea will link any conventional reduction in forces to a withdrawal of US military forces.¹³ US and ROK policy supports a post-unification US military presence.

STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT

When the DPRK publicly admitted to secretly developing nuclear weapons for years in violation of ratified international agreements, US policy was thrown into a tailspin.¹⁴

Prior to this announcement, the US was cautiously moving forward with the 1994 agreed framework. This previous attempt at engagement offered to build two light-water nuclear reactors in exchange for a DPRK commitment to freeze its nuclear weapons program.¹⁵ The Bush Administration was cautious because the DPRK had refused to allow agreed upon IAEA inspections.¹⁶

The impact of this announcement is significant. It violates the spirit and intent of the 1994 framework,¹⁷ which the DPRK now considers void. More importantly, it violates the letter of the 1992 inter-Korean agreement specifying no WMD.¹⁸ The US initially favors deliberation and diplomacy, and continues to consult with regional allies.¹⁹ This reasoned approach provides the administration with maximum flexibility.

The DPRK is an enigma. Kim Jung Il succeeded his father, Kim Il Sung, in 1994 and quickly solidified his military power base. His regime fears its own failure, is leery of an ROK attempt to absorb it like West Germany absorbed East Germany, and geopolitically views itself as encircled by evil capitalist forces. Accordingly, its main focus is survival and defeating an anticipated US/ROK invasion to force unification.²⁰

North Korea maintains a 1.2 million man army, with two-thirds of this force deployed along the DMZ, less than 50 miles from the ROK capital of Seoul.²¹ Although economic data is scarce, the 1998 estimated gross domestic product of \$12.6 billion was 55% below its estimated 1990 level.²² North Korea has endured a severe famine for most of the 1990's and several million people have perished due to starvation and/or malnutrition.²³ Medical care and education systems are in disarray, with most hospitals lacking even the most basic medicines.²⁴ In addition, there is an estimated 18.6 billion-kilowatt power shortage - roughly 50% of DPRK requirements.²⁵

Despite these challenges, Kim's government continues to survive, due in large part to its national ideological belief or "Juche," which means extreme self-reliance. Kim Il Sung originated this philosophy and virtually all citizens have been inculcated with this mantra of avoiding foreign influence, rejecting materialism, and complete belief in Korean communism.²⁶ North Korea views the fall of the Soviet Union and China's market reforms with disdain.

The DPRK's recent announcement of a nuclear weapons program, coupled with previous summits with the ROK and Japan, signal to some that the DPRK is ready to engage its neighbors and the US. However, for many critics, this is the latest in a long series of roguish actions and is viewed as more of the same.²⁷

South Korean President Kim Dae Jung received a Nobel Peace Prize in 2000 for his "Sunshine Policy", which openly advocated economic and social engagement with North Korea. Based on three principles, 1) no tolerance of DPRK armed aggression, 2) no ROK initiative to absorb the DPRK, and 3) a commitment to peaceful reconciliation and cooperation with the DPRK, his "Sunshine Policy" has led to closer ties with North Korea.²⁸

Although many of the initiatives stalled, such as linking the two Koreas by rail and road, others succeeded, most notably cross-border family reunions. Meanwhile, the ROK enjoys good relations with Japan and the ROK has dramatically improved both diplomatic²⁹ and economic³⁰ relations with China. Economically, South Korea is a regional power.

Despite an official statement to continue engagement,³¹ it is unclear what impact the DPRK's nuclear announcement will have on the pending ROK elections. Previous to this announcement, Kim's policy had been subject to criticism³² that caused a no-confidence vote on policy.³³ Lee Hoi Chang, a leading candidate to replace President Kim Dae Jong in December, would likely take a harder line and is more pro-US.³⁴ Lack of a suitable resolution to the North Korean nuclear program could lead the ROK to deploy its own nuclear capability.³⁵

In Japan, Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi's recent meeting with Kim Jung Il was historic. Japan apologized for its previous occupation of the peninsula and pledged significant economic support. North Korea apologized for previously abducting Japanese citizens, extended a moratorium on missile testing until 2003, and agreed to allow IAEA inspections.³⁶ This dramatically improved Japanese relations with the DPRK and increased Japanese diplomatic influence on the peninsula.³⁷ Japan is cautiously committed to engagement despite the DPRK nuclear program announcement.³⁸ Like the ROK, if the nuclear issue remains unresolved, Japan could feel compelled to deploy its own nuclear capability.

China considers the eventual withdrawal of US forces from the peninsula important and prefers to minimize both US and Japanese influence in the region.³⁹ China supports peaceful unification and a nuclear free peninsula.⁴⁰ China does not want to see a DPRK collapse and has urged the DPRK to embrace market-based solutions.⁴¹ The persistent North Korean famine created a humanitarian crisis in northwest China, as tens of thousands of North Korean citizens

crossed the border in search of food and work.⁴² Entry into the World Trade Organization (WTO) reflects a Chinese trend of engaging the world community and a preference for diplomacy.

Russia supports the DPRK and prefers non-radical change on the peninsula, but support is measured and Russia advocates dialogue between the two Koreas.⁴³ Although helping to modernize some antiquated DPRK military equipment, Russia flatly refused to supply modern fighters and tanks.⁴⁴ Russia remains an ally and would benefit from Korean unification, as goods could be shipped by rail from ports in South Korea to the Russian Far East.⁴⁵

Despite geographic separation, the European Union (EU) has a role to play in terms of humanitarian assistance and promulgation of dialogue.⁴⁶ The EU facilitates much needed humanitarian assistance and provides North Korea with an outlet to explore cultural and political exchange with the west.⁴⁷

Given the strategic environment in the Far East, the US should move decisively toward principled engagement despite the recent DPRK announcement of a nuclear program. The US has long suspected this to be the case and must avoid a hard-line response.⁴⁸ Engagement provides the single best opportunity for accomplishment of US objectives on the peninsula, most of which are shared by regional allies.

HOW TO PROCEED

The US should build upon existing coalitions and engage the DPRK in a coordinated attempt to bring a comprehensive settlement to the Korean peninsula. The goal of the US should be to employ a strategy of conditional engagement that considers all of its goals for the region in one framework and avoids a sequential approach. The Bush Administration should propose an

expansion of the so-called “four party” talks (North and South Korea, China, and the US) to include Russia and Japan.

Given the overarching US objective of regional stability, the regional coalition should be guided by three principles – transparency, verification, and reciprocity. Trust is the coin of the diplomat’s realm and transparency and verification are two sides of this coin. Both are necessary because the DPRK is arguably the most reclusive nation on earth and its closed nature makes trust very difficult. This is particularly true when strategic intelligence reveals obvious variance between reality and official government positions, such as the nuclear weapons program.

Reciprocity will require a fundamental shift in DPRK interaction, as it has historically engaged in diplomatic brinkmanship. In 1998, when the CIA determined that the DPRK was likely operating a nuclear weapons facility in violation of the agreed framework, the DPRK denied the allegation and refused IAEA inspections. Eventually, the DPRK permitted an inspection, but only after the US agreed to a \$200 million grain transfer and only after sufficient time had elapsed to allow pre-inspection site modification.

This is the time for engagement. As stated in the national security strategy, the US has unprecedented power and no intent on pressing for unilateral advantage.⁴⁹ The US should use all of its instruments of power to exercise bold leadership and stabilize the Korean Peninsula and the Far East region. This conditional engagement should consider all objectives in total and seek an agreed upon verifiable timetable to move from the initial phases to the final settlement.

Politically, the US should work with the ROK and Japan first and agree on sustainable coalition goals. Since Japan and South Korea both substantially support the US objectives, the coalition could move forward with a mutual position. It is critical to have agreement, not merely US hegemonic insistence, because the alliance cannot afford a fracture as negotiations proceed.

Additionally, the coalition should communicate openly with China and Russia about its vision for the peninsula. Once the coalition is clear on shared objectives, the US should take the lead on multi-lateral six-party talks with North and South Korea, Japan, China, and Russia.

Diplomatically, the list of issues needs to include all of the US and coalition goals but must also address issues that are very important to the DPRK. These goals include removal from the “terrorist nation list,”⁵⁰ normalization of US and DPRK relations, and a reiteration of US policy not to attack North Korea.⁵¹ The US should be very open about its goal to negotiate a comprehensive settlement, as this will put pressure on the North Koreans to participate in good faith. It also provides an opportunity for Russia and China to work quietly behind the scenes and attempt to influence the DPRK.

The US should engage the people of North Korea using all available methods of communication, including “Voice of America” and embassy involvement with regional print and broadcast media. The US should attempt to sow future seeds of goodwill directly with the North Korean people promising assistance after a settlement is reached, highlighting previous positive action taken by the US,⁵² and working with regional allies to build US credibility. As relations improve, cultural, educational, and high-level military exchange should be pursued.

Soft power can be particularly useful as relations improve among all parties, but the US needs to be cognizant of Far Eastern culture and the need to save face among these nations. The US should not coddle Kim Jung Il’s regime, but it should avoid inflammatory rhetoric that causes the government public or regional embarrassment.

A key component for the coalition, as this framework takes shape and begins to potentially bear fruit, is continued unconditional engagement in the form of humanitarian aid. Food stocks and basic medicinal support can directly and immediately alleviate some of the

suffering of the North Korean people. This type of aid shows good faith and is not easily converted to military programs. This would not be inconsistent with an overall engagement policy, as the US currently provides approximately 80% of UN World Food Program donations to North Korea.⁵³

Economically, the coalition should be prepared to assist North Korea with food and technology to alleviate the effects of the famine and avoid similar occurrences in the future. The DPRK's electrical grid is antiquated and in need of repair.⁵⁴ One possible solution would be to offer non-nuclear power production facilities, in lieu of the previously agreed upon light water reactors, as a way to avoid further proliferation attempts and still satisfy the DPRK's power requirements. This could be negotiated using existing Korean Energy Development Organization (KEDO) provisions, which included US, ROK, Japan, and EU involvement. Contextually, given North Korea's announcement that the agreed framework is void, this is not a renege on the agreed framework. Rather, it offers the DPRK a viable alternative that is in its national interest. As an inducement, the coalition could offer to help modernize the power grid, which was not part of the agreed framework.

Concessions for non-proliferation of missile technology must include transition assistance to allow the DPRK to develop other sources of revenue. Assuming removal from the terrorist list, this could be accomplished with World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) capital investment; however, the coalition must absolutely verify that the funds are being used for the agreed upon purposes. Without ironclad verification, this is a non-starter. Direct US humanitarian aid of over \$500 million since 1995⁵⁵ and substantial compliance by the US, ROK, and Japan on the agreed framework since 1994 did not prevent the DPRK from continuing its nuclear program. Verification is an absolute must!

North Korea could benefit from trade, but only if it will open itself up to private investment and actively secure that investment from corruption. China and Russia have both made tremendous strides in these areas and would likely attempt positive persuasion. Such investment could improve the transportation infrastructure over time and allow trade routes traversing North Korea to link South Korean ports with Asian markets. These considerations would require the DPRK leadership to moderate its Juche-centric economic principles, which mandate state-owned production facilities, central planning, and self-sufficiency for all goods.⁵⁶ Regionally, all coalition members would benefit from increased trade.

Militarily, to stabilize the region, the North must abandon its nuclear program and agree to limit its missile sales and proliferation. Additionally, the US and South Korea should be prepared to engage in substantive and meaningful conventional reductions with North Korea. This will not be easy, as the DPRK views nuclear weapons development as a deterrent against US aggression and its conventional military capability is its center of gravity. The US has some diplomatic leverage here, having removed its nuclear weapons from South Korea following the 1992 inter-Korean agreement.

There is more urgency on the nuclear weapons program and verifiable progress would need to come early. Conventional reductions are more problematic, but with measured steps a verifiable reduction of conventional forces on both sides is possible. Within this context, discussion should include an expanded DMZ.

The US has no military ambition toward the DPRK and does not seek forced unification. In light of the war on terror and the US national security strategy, it is conceivable that the US would use preemptive military action against the DPRK; however, such action is highly unlikely

because there is no DPRK link to terrorist networks.⁵⁷ If such a link developed, the US calculus could change.

CONSTRAINTS

Predictably, there are a lot of domestic and international constraints, but these should not deter the US from its leadership role. Domestically, the US will face considerable skepticism from a Congress that will openly question DPRK credibility, particularly in light of the recent nuclear program admission.⁵⁸ The closer these initiatives are to an election cycle, the louder the criticism will be, but some in Congress will support the administration and all will support success. In addition, key special interest groups will criticize the policy from both sides, but again, all new initiatives that change the status quo are criticized. In particular, the lack of focus on human rights and religious freedom will cause disdain, but these important issues have a much better chance of success after the stated objectives are substantially accomplished.

To minimize friction, the President should consider two important steps to ease domestic resistance and foster support for necessary funding. First, the President should appoint a special envoy, similar to President Clinton's nomination of former Senator Mitchell to negotiate the peace settlement in Northern Ireland. A good potential choice would be a former Pacific Combatant commander or a former ambassador/State Department official with Far East regional experience.

Secondly, the President should discuss his vision up front with key members of the House and Senate, and ensure that his envoy briefs key committees on a regular basis. In addition, the President should tell the American public of his plans to engage, being open about the risks and explaining why engagement is in our long-term national interest. Finally, in conjunction with these initiatives, the President must make it clear to the public, the Congress,

and all Far East regional nations that the US remains unequivocally committed to our long-term allies – South Korea and Japan.

Externally, South Korea has a presidential election in December and the new administration could undermine coalition goals. In addition, many younger South Koreans are opposed to a US presence in their country and romanticize the danger of DPRK intentions, although this has moderated with the DPRK admission of a nuclear weapons program.

North Korea may not be receptive to a comprehensive agenda, advocating a step-by-step approach with coalition concessions up front. The US must resist this, as this pattern of accepting aid and not following through has been all too prevalent from the DPRK.⁵⁹ Additionally, the DPRK might be reluctant to meet with any other nation besides the US; however, multi-lateral negotiations are key and must be insisted upon.

Japan is faced with a growing domestic sense of urgency to re-arm itself beyond the current self-defense force construct. Future elections could undermine progress if a more radical element comes to power, especially given the DPRK nuclear announcement and previous long-range missile tests. Lastly, Japan's continued economic woes could limit national support for likely economic incentive requirements.

China will likely try to link complete US withdrawal of forces to its support for a comprehensive final settlement. They would likely cast this issue in the same regional stability light in which the US presented its goals and try to garner Russian and DPRK support for this position. The US should resist this gambit, insisting that the US and the ROK will determine any US withdrawal from the peninsula, and that a US presence is a stabilizing influence. The US should point to its military withdrawal from the Philippine Islands and a 2002 agreement with the ROK to reduce its military footprint in terms of base and land use by 50%, as proof of its

good faith on this issue. It is likely that China will accept a US peninsular presence provided there are no US troops north of the 38th parallel.

Russia will also likely support the coalition's goals. They too might advocate US military withdrawal but, given China's continual emergence as a regional power, Russia would likely view the US presence as a stabilizing influence. A de-nuclear Korean peninsula with a reduced conventional military presence is in Russia's national interest and they would likely urge North Korea to negotiate in good faith.

Despite these constraints, the US should engage North Korea. The coalition should outline a comprehensive framework addressing all coalition and North Korean goals, determine an acceptable time line, and absolutely ensure outcomes that are transparent, verifiable, and reciprocal.

IF ENGAGEMENT FAILS

Engagement offers the best chance for success, but the DPRK is unpredictable and might reject this US led coalition attempt at comprehensive settlement. Given the strategic environment discussed above, if North Korea rejected this engagement strategy, the US would likely advocate a strategy of compellence through isolation. The US goal would be to compel North Korea to resume diplomatic engagement.

Compellence, like engagement, would only be as successful as the coalition's collective ability to isolate North Korea. Given the weak economy, persistent famine, and the insufficient support from former communist benefactors, it is plausible that the DPRK might attack South Korea out of desperation, rather than reconsider diplomacy. If this occurs, the US is committed to the defense of South Korea.

MILITARY OBJECTIVES, CONCEPTS, AND LIMITATIONS

A DPRK attack would be a desperate attempt at survival in the face of isolation. The military goals would likely be to occupy Seoul, seize key regions and resources in South Korea, drive the US from the peninsula before reinforcements arrive, and try to consolidate gains before the US could re-group.⁶⁰ The DPRK anticipates Chinese logistical support and possibly military support.

The DPRK force is formidable. Comprised of mainly massed infantry, it has significant mechanized and armored capability augmented by considerable artillery formations – the majority of which is within striking distance of Seoul. These forces are maintained in a high state of readiness and a cross-border attack could come with little or no warning. They would seek to mitigate US/ROK technological advantage through proximity to civilian personnel. In addition to the frontal assault across the DMZ, the DPRK would likely use special operations forces to establish a second front in the south.⁶¹

The DPRK maintains an undetermined WMD capability and this could be employed at the start of hostilities, but this is unlikely.⁶² Kim Jung Il would likely keep the attack conventional, which provides the best chance at consolidation in the south. The introduction of WMD would invite a reciprocal US response, which could be accomplished in a variety of ways with devastating affect.

The US's overwhelming victories in Desert Storm and Kosovo will not be lost on the North Korean military. They will maximize use of speed, apply overwhelming force at pre-selected US/ROK choke points, and will use deception to the greatest extent possible. The first 48-72 hours of combat will likely determine the outcome.

The US and the ROK have trained together for years and would respond militarily. Although outnumbered, the US/ROK forces would enjoy a dramatic technological advantage in terms of air, land, and sea power. Japan would not be asked for direct military support, given its history on the peninsula; however, it would provide basing rights and logistic support. UN support could be expected eventually, but the pace at which hostilities would proceed make waiting for such support unrealistic.

The coalition's goals would be to stop the initial DPRK assault and establish a perimeter around Seoul. However, given the capital's proximity to the DMZ and the initiative seized by North Korea, Seoul might fall and force the defensive perimeter to be established further south. This would be an organized defensive strategy, with US/ROK forces inflicting substantial damage as it withdrew in an orderly manner.⁶³ The US/ROK equipment and firepower is superior and a defensive perimeter would likely be established, if not around Seoul, than no further south than the Kum River and perpendicular to the Taebak Mountain range.

Once established, the US would reinforce and prepare for a counter-offensive. While awaiting reinforcement, US/ROK airpower would continually punish the North Korean supply lines and available military targets. Clearly, the US and ROK would seek to limit civilian casualties. The combined US/ROK naval forces are superior to the DPRK's, and to the extent that the DPRK forces venture south, the US/ROK would be superior in both surface and sub-surface engagements.⁶⁴

Like the original Korean War, US/ROK airpower has enormous capability that would allow it to strike DPRK forces hard. Unlike the 1950-53 campaign, advances in weapons technology provide the coalition with much greater lethality placing even hardened DPRK targets at risk. However, there should be no misconceptions about airpower's ability. This will

not be a Gulf War type of battle fought in open desert as the terrain in North Korea is significantly more difficult to negotiate. Airpower would be critical and successful, but not decisive, as US/ROK ground forces would have to move north and defeat the DPRK army. Once the counter-offensive started, the goal would be destruction of the DPRK military capability and conditional surrender of Kim Jung Il's government.

A second Korean War would likely result in a lot of casualties and untold civilian hardship in the North and South. The North Korean center of gravity is its Army, which includes approximately 1.2 million men who are highly motivated. The Army is loyal to Kim Jung Il and will fight hard, embodying a spirit of Juche and a desire to survive. Given the goal of regime survival, Kim Jung Il is unlikely to use WMD and lose his ability to possibly negotiate a settlement.

On the US/ROK side, the center of gravity is time and a perceived resistance to bloodshed. Time is needed to reinforce and counter-strike. Dramatic post cold war success has conditioned the US populace and its Congress to expect minimal casualties and quick victories. This will not likely be the case. In addition, both nations remember 1951, when the Chinese engaged militarily and forced a stalemate along the 38th parallel.

DIPLOMACY IN THE FACE OF HOSTILITIES

As soon as the DPRK initiated hostilities, the US and ROK would engage diplomatically through the UN. The US would likely compare this act of aggression to the Iraq invasion of Kuwait and seek similar UN sanctions on North Korea. A plausible exit strategy for the US might be a UN resolution for a cease-fire coupled with a pullback of DPRK forces to the DMZ. However, the resolution would also need to include an expanded DMZ and provisions for post

cease-fire disarmament of the North Korean military, both nuclear and conventional. In addition, full IAEA inspection and certification must be a requirement.

Clausewitz wrote that war springs from a political purpose and the conduct of war remains focused on this purpose.⁶⁵ The US goals remain the same and these UN sanctions would substantially accomplish stated coalition goals for regional security. This would not be a complete disarmament, but a forced reduction to a level consistent with conventional self-defense and at a level that would not permit external aggression. At this point, the US and the UN should avoid rhetorical language regarding regime change, and remain focused on North Korean withdrawal and destruction of its capability to harm.

Commensurate with the UN demand for withdrawal and sanctions, the UN Security Council should authorize the use of force to occupy North Korea, if the DPRK refuses to comply. This would be a legal decision, by the UN, to force a regime change in North Korea. The US should make it clear to the UN that it would not occupy North Korea and would only stay north of the 38th parallel long enough to stabilize the region, provide needed food and supplies to the population, and assist in UN monitored free and fair elections for a new Korean government.

The US should quietly communicate to China and Russia that all US forces will stop short of the Chongchom River and that only South Korean forces would advance to the Chinese border. Additionally, the US should give assurances, in the interest of post-hostility regional stability, that no US military forces will remain stationed north of the 38th parallel, leaving open the possibility of UN peacekeepers. This would likely garner Chinese and Russian support. China's participation would be critical given its intervention in the first Korean War.

IF DIPLOMACY FAILS TO STOP THE WAR

It is possible, but unlikely, that North Korea would agree to a withdrawal, but military disarmament would be a bridge too far for this regime. However, the North Koreans could not be allowed to initiate hostilities and avoid international sanction. If they refused to pull back and accept UN demands, then Kim Jung Il's government would cease to exist as a legitimate nation-state.

Once reinforced, the US/ROK would launch a counter-offensive. If Seoul were occupied, the coalition could surround and secure the city's perimeter, but avoid unnecessary civilian casualties by "island hopping" the city and proceeding north to destroy military capabilities. After occupying the North Korean capital and destroying its ability to wage war, the forces occupying Seoul would likely surrender; however, it is possible that urban warfare would be necessary – in some cases, fighting street-to-street and house-to-house.

Prior to the counter-offensive beginning, the US should diplomatically reiterate its end-state objectives to China, Russia, and Japan. The goals of regional stability remain the same. After hostilities end, the Korean people would determine their future under UN, not US auspices, the peninsula would be certified nuclear free by IAEA inspectors, the DPRK missile program would be terminated, and the resultant conventional capability maintained on the peninsula would be commensurate with Korean defense needs. Also, the US would not press to the Sino-Korean border and would withdraw its troops below the 38th parallel maintaining the buffer between Chinese and US forces.

The US and the ROK would use all intelligence assets to determine where the DPRK WMD were stored and/or fielded, because it is possible that Kim Jung Il or one of his military

leaders might launch a WMD in a final act of desperation. The US should engage their Chinese and Russian intelligence counterparts in this effort.

The time line is uncertain, but the US/ROK forces would very likely prevail in this scenario. This is clearly not the preferred method of peninsular unification; however, the Korean peninsula would be united and the people would determine a new government under UN auspices. The US would work with Japan, the ROK, and the EU to provide a support package to re-build the North's infrastructure, similar to what was offered under the policy of engagement. Eventually, the people of Korea would have a much better life, although the wounds would take a generation to heal.

CONCLUSION

Given the strategic environment, a DPRK Army invasion is plausible; however, neither the US nor the ROK desires military action. Based on US objectives for regional stability, as they relate to the strategic environment, it is conclusive that engagement is the right US policy choice. The two antitheses outlined in the introduction are inferior plans.

A policy that seeks compellence through isolation, without first trying to engage, is flawed from a regional stability perspective. The US does not seek military action against the North Koreans, but a policy that seeks to force its collapse would likely lead to a military conflict. Even if military conflict did not result from this policy, the long-term impact on US regional reputation would be counter-productive to regional stability. The US is aware of the plight of the North Korean people and has an obligation, as a world leader and a regional leader, to try and help. If coalition engagement is rejected by North Korea, then compellence and isolation may become necessary, but in an entirely different context. Here, the coalition

response would be viewed as compelling a return to diplomacy and not as an attempt to force regime collapse. A great nation must lead and only take such action as a last resort.

Similarly, a policy that simply appeases a recalcitrant government that places narrow military objectives over the needs of its people is unacceptable and damaging to US interests long term. If the US and its allies provide nothing but unconditional engagement, in the form of food, cultural exchange, and capital improvements, it is de facto validation of North Korean behavior. It would encourage other nations to act similarly. Such appeasement is inherently destabilizing and would encourage further belligerence by the DPRK and likely lead the ROK and Japan to expand their military capabilities.

Clearly, principled engagement is the correct policy for the US government. From a world leadership perspective, it reflects a confident nation willing to be reasonable and seek consensus from both its allies and strategic competitors. It reflects a nation willing to provide limited unconditional support within a principled conditional engagement construct. Long term, this policy is consistent with US values as it seeks to improve the North Korean quality of life, seeks to remove the DPRK nuclear threat, and seeks to secure regional stability in the Far East. Principled engagement through a regional coalition, based on transparency, verification, and reciprocity, is the most viable national security strategy for the US.

Notes

¹ Suk H. Kim and Chang Soo Huh, “North Korea at Crossroads,” Multinational Business Review, Fall 2002, 111.

² James Miles, “Waiting out North Korea,” Survival, Vol. 44, No. 2, Summer 2002, 39-41.

³ Miles, 39-41.

⁴ The Commission on America’s National Interests defined vital national interests as being reserved for matters essential to the existence or continuance of something indispensable, such as long standing alliances and regional allies. In addition, vital interests preserve the US as a free nation with our fundamental institutions and values intact, including the international conditions for this to occur. The Far East is a region of the world where the US has vital economic, political, and cultural ties and the destabilization of the Far East would threaten these interests. “America’s National Interests,” The Commission on America’s National Interests, July 2000.

⁵ U.S. Department of State, U.S. Economic Relations with East Asia and the Pacific, 2002 (Washington DC).

⁶ The Taepo Dong II missile, if fully developed with a third stage, could reach Alaska, Hawaii, and the West Coast of the US. U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency, “Military Forces,” North Korea: The Foundations for Military Strength, December 1995, 5.

⁷ Larry A. Niksch, “Korea: U.S.-South Korean Relations – Issues for Congress,” Congressional Research Service Report for Congress, June 19, 2002, 1-4.

⁸ United States Institute of Peace, Mistrust and the Korean Peninsula: Dangers of Miscalculation, October 1998, 3-5.

⁹ Nikcsh, 4-6.

¹⁰ Zhang Xizhen and Eugene Brown, “Policies toward North Korea: a time for new thinking,” Journal of Contemporary China, November 2000, 3-7.

¹¹ United States Institute of Peace, Mistrust and the Korean Peninsula: Dangers of Miscalculation, October 1998, 4.

¹² Victor D. Cha, “Korea’s Place in the Axis,” Foreign Affairs, May/June 2002, 1-4.

¹³ The North Korean approach to inter-Korean arms control was reiterated in 2001 and includes 3 steps: 1) realignment of the external security environment (removal of US troops from the peninsula), 2) inter-Korean arms reduction, and 3) confidence building measures. James J. Przystup, “Anticipating Strategic Surprise on the Korean Peninsula,” Strategic Forum, No. 190, March 2002, 3-4.

¹⁴ Peter Slevin and Karen DeYoung, “N. Korea admits having secret nuclear arms,” The Washington Post, 17 October 2002, sec. A.

¹⁵ U.S. Department of State, Joint Statement on North Korea, 2001 (Washington, DC).

¹⁶ Charles L. Pritchard, U.S. Department of State special envoy for negotiations with DPRK, Joint Policy toward the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, Testimony before the Subcommittee on East Asia, House Committee on International relations, July 26, 2001.

¹⁷ In October 1996 the GAO determined that the agreed framework was political and not legally binding on either party. Daryl M. Plunk, “Time for a New North Korea Policy,” Background: The Heritage Foundation, no. 1304, 2 July 1999, 4-6.

¹⁸ In his 1992 New Year's message, Kim Jung Il stated "it is our one unalterable position to make the Korean peninsula a nuclear-free and peaceful region..." Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment, "China and Northeast Asia," Armed Forces, 8 February 2001, 2-3.

¹⁹ Ashton B. Carter and William J. Perry, "Back to the Brink," The Washington Post, 20 October 2002, sec. B.

²⁰ Han S. Park, "North Korean Perceptions of Self and Others: Implications for Policy Choices," Pacific Affairs, Winter 2000, 506-508.

²¹ Margaret Warner, "Easing Sanctions, a Newshour interview with former Secretary of Defense, William Perry," The Newshour with Jim Lehrer, Public Broadcasting Station (PBS), September 17, 1999, transcript, p. 1.

²² Kim and Huh, 117.

²³ U.S. General Accounting Office, Foreign Assistance: U.S. bilateral food assistance to North Korea had mixed results, June 2000, 9.

²⁴ Economist Intelligence Unit, "North Korea at a glance: 2002-03," Country Report: North Korea, August 2002, 15.

²⁵ Przystup, 3.

²⁶ Park, 504-506.

²⁷ Roguish actions cited include persistent missile tests, lingering suspicion of WMD development, and an armed naval altercation with the ROK in 1999. Xizhen and Brown, 2.

²⁸ Kim and Huh, 117.

²⁹ Kim and Huh, 117.

³⁰ United States Institute of Peace Special Report, North Korea's Decline and China's Strategic Dilemmas, October, 1997, 1-2.

³¹ Peter Slevin and Glenn Kessler, "Bush Plans Diplomacy on N. Korea's Arms Effort," The Washington Post, 18 October 2002, sec. A.

³² Critics attacked this policy because it failed to make North Korea reciprocate for South Korean actions and was perceived as a free ride for the DPRK and forced Minister Lim Dong Won to resign. Mark E. Manyin, "North-South Korean Relations: A Chronology of the "New" Dialogue, Congressional Research Service Report for Congress," April 30, 2001, 2-3.

³³ Przystup, 1.

³⁴ Lee Hoi Chang, "Korea at the Crossroads: The Challenges Ahead," Heritage Lectures, delivered January 23, 2002.

³⁵ In accordance with the 1992 inter-Korean agreement, the ROK and the US removed all nuclear weapons from the peninsula. These weapons were US made and controlled, and the ROK did not have a nuclear weapons capability of its own.

³⁶ Sebastian Moffet, Jay Solomon, and David S. Cloud, "Warming Trend: North Korea Opens Door to New Ties with Japan, World," Wall Street Journal, 18 September 2002, Eastern Edition, 1-3.

³⁷ Miles, 38.

³⁸ Slevin and Kessler, sec. A.

³⁹ Przystup, 3.

⁴⁰ United States Institute of Peace Special Report, North Korea's Decline and China's Strategic Dilemmas, October, 1997, 1-2.

⁴¹ Kim and Huh, 116.

⁴² United States Institute of Peace Special Report, The Politics of Famine in North Korea, August 2, 1999, 6-8.

⁴³ Kim and Huh, 116.

⁴⁴ Manyin, 16.

⁴⁵ Miles, 44.

⁴⁶ Manyin, 2.

⁴⁷ Miles, 46 – 47.

⁴⁸ Hans M. Kristensen, “Preemptive posturing: What happened to deterrence?” Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, September/October, 2002, 2-6.

⁴⁹ United States of America, The National Security Strategy of the United States of America, September 2002, 1.

⁵⁰ This is potentially possible given the DPRK’s commitment to 7 international terrorism accords and the recent thaw in DPRK/Japanese relations. Previously, Japan objected due to the kidnapping issue and suspected DPRK involvement with the Red Brigade. Miles, 42.

⁵¹ Spencer Michels, “Korean Visit,” The Newshour with Jim Lehrer, Public Broadcasting Station (PBS), February 20, 2002, transcript, p. 1.

⁵² Such as humanitarian aid and the removal of all nuclear weapons in 1991 in accord with the 1992 inter-Korean treaty. Kristensen, 4.

⁵³ U.S. General Accounting Office, Foreign Assistance: U.S. Bilateral Food Assistance to North Korea had Mixed Results, June 2000, 10.

⁵⁴ Przystup, 3.

⁵⁵ Plunk, 1.

⁵⁶ Kim and Huh, 112.

⁵⁷ Ray Suarez, “Axis of Evil - comments by former CIA director, James Woolsey,” The Newshour with Jim Lehrer, Public Broadcasting Station (PBS), January 30, 2002, transcript, p. 3.

⁵⁸ For example, as recently as 27 October, Sen John McCain (Senator from Arizona) referred to the Clinton Administration’s agreed framework as bribery and pointed to North Korea’s lack of credibility in terms of international agreements.

⁵⁹ Manyin, 1-4.

⁶⁰ Jane’s Sentinel Security Assessment, “China and Northeast Asia,” Armed Forces, 8 February 2001, 1-5.

⁶¹ U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency, “Military Forces,” North Korea: The Foundations for Military Strength, December 1995, 1-11.

⁶² Jane’s Sentinel Security Assessment, “China and Northeast Asia,” Armed Forces, 8 February 2001, 1-5.

⁶³ There are limited routes available to support the massed DPRK forces as they attack through the DMZ. The US and ROK know where they are and are prepared to severely disrupt DPRK mobility.

⁶⁴ Federation of Atomic Scientists, “Navy,” Intelligence Resource Program, 18 July 1999, 1-3.

⁶⁵ Carl Von Clausewitz, On War, (New Jersey: Princeton, 1976), 75-89

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